

Gubernatorial debate was short on education-funding specifics

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Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, left, shakes hands with challenger Bill Bryant before the two debate at Spokane Falls Community College Wednesday in Spokane. Moderator Sean Owsley of KHQ-TV stands at right. (Jesse Tinsley/The Associated Press)

Gubernatorial debate was a disappointment on the subject of education-finance reform.

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)
The Seattle Times

THE most important work Washington's governor will do next year is lead the charge toward reforming the way the state pays for its public schools. The first debate between Gov. Jay Inslee and his Republican challenger, Bill Bryant, gave the public few clues how either of them would do that.

There is nothing more important on the state's agenda than finishing the work the Washington State Supreme Court set out in its 2012 McCleary decision.

Inslee and Bryant need to move beyond the talking points and the geography lessons of all the small towns where they have lived and focus on solutions — not just about education, of course, but on transportation, mental health and a strong economy beyond the thriving Puget Sound.

The voters have had enough crisis intervention over the state's problems. Washington needs smart planning and bold action.

During the debate in Spokane on Wednesday, Inslee said that the Legislature is well on its way to completing that work and he will stay out of the way and let them do it. The state would be closer to a solution if Inslee, as a candidate four years ago, had not shut down the conversation around local-levy reform. Increasingly, the majority of lawmakers include that as a major part of the McCleary solution.

Bryant was far too dismissive of the effectiveness of the education-reform work already completed. Astoundingly, he expressed doubt that any new revenue is needed to fully pay the cost of basic education.

[KHQ-TV: Watch the full debate](#)

Education-focused lawmakers in both political parties say the final installment of education-finance reform has a price tag of at least \$3 billion over the next two-year budget cycle.

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The Legislature has made substantive progress, and a bipartisan group of state senators developed a framework two years ago that could have led to finishing the job.

We’re still waiting.

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The state’s paramount duty of educating its young residents needs more than a few minutes of attention. Future debates should focus more on how Inslee and Bryant can be the state leaders who would move Washington state toward education equity and full funding.

Voters should remember this state’s most important challenge when candidates knock on their doors and appear at community meetings looking for votes. Bring the conversation back to how these candidates are going to help Washington reform the way it pays for public schools.

Candidates might prefer to talk about anything else, but voters and journalists should not let them.

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